



Dance of democracy

Two parties in ruling coalition block holding local elections on schedule



PRADEEP RAJ ONTAR/SS

● Santa Gaha Magar

As per Nepal's Local Election Act 2017, voting for all 753 local governments must be held by 19 March. But the governing coalition that is supposed to announce poll dates has been dilly-dallying because two of its members want it postponed.

Although in a meeting of the High-level Political Mechanism on Tuesday, all parties is said to have agreed to hold the local polls "on time as per the Constitution", the Maoist Centre (MC) and the Unified Socialist (US) are still proposing a delay, even suggesting that federal elections be held first.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the MC is said to have come out most strongly in Tuesday's meeting to postpone local elections till November, even if it took an ordinance to amend the law to do so.

The MC and US both want more time to prepare for the polls because they are fragments of larger parties.

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress and Janata Samajbadi Party on the other hand want the election as scheduled on 27 April.

At an all-party meeting at the Election Commission on 14 January, the MC and US came up with a legal argument that there were different provisions in the Constitution and the Act regarding the tenure of local representatives. They even used the pandemic, high cost of separate polls, and 'election fatigue' as pretexts to postpone the polls.

"All of us are for local elections to be held immediately and we said as much, except for the Maoists and the United Socialists," revealed Jhanak Pyakurel of the rightwing Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). "Periodic elections are a

prerequisite in a democracy, they should be held as scheduled in April." Indeed, 13 leaders out of 15 parties at the meeting said elections should be held on time. MC and US were the only ones demanding postponement.

And it is clear why: Dahal wants elections to all three levels held simultaneously and that provincial and federal elections be held before local elections because he fears his party will be trounced in local polls.

Dahal is aware that his party has stagnated and suffered defections since the last elections in 2017, and has seen an erosion of its mass base. One MC leader confided that the party was finding it difficult even to find candidates in some municipalities and wards, let alone win them.

Dahal is also worried that the



Polls in the time of pandemic EDITORIAL PAGE 2

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Polls in the time of pandemic

After hemming and hawing about holding local elections, top leaders of the five-party alliance that met on Tuesday finally made some headway.

The good news is that they said they were committed to holding the local polls "on time". The bad news is that the parties were even thinking of postponing polls to suit their electoral prospects, even though that is entirely the purview of the Election Commission.

And who knows what they mean by "on time"? Nepali time is elastic.

The 'high level political mechanism' is an uber-government prone to bend the Constitution whichever way it suits them.

However, on elections, mechanism members are not united. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress wants to hold local polls as scheduled on 27 April, and this puts him closer to the opposition UML's stand.

The JSP also wants the local polls in April, but the Pushpa Kamal Dahal of the Maoist Centre and Madhav Kumar Nepal of the Unified Socialists being from fragments of larger parties, want more time to prepare for elections. And the pandemic has been the perfect pretext to argue for postponing it.

The other argument they are using is that elections are costly, and why not have all three tiers of elections in November?

There are differing provisions for local elections in Nepal's Constitution and election laws. While Article 225 of the Constitution stipulates new local leaders be elected within six months after the terms of the current leaders expire, Nepal's Local Level Election Act 2017 states that elections be held two months before the terms of the current representatives end.

Coalition leaders are said to be exploring the possibility of passing an ordinance to amend the local election law so that they can hold local elections when they see fit — which means later in the year.

That provisions for elections are inconsistent, subject to amendments at the convenience of political leaders, and that the Election Commission is unable to make an independent decision is emblematic of a failing state.

It shows just how centralised Nepal's power structure is, and how blatant political interference in Constitutional bodies like the Election Commission has become.

The differing positions within the governing coalition on proposed election dates have further exposed the volatile

dynamics within the five-party coalition.

As it is, the ruling coalition is already on thin ice due to differences over the US-supported MCC project, as well as over the Nepali Congress being disinclined to form an electoral alliance with coalition partners. Differences over MCC ratification by Parliament, already threatens to split the coalition of which some members are said to be beholden to Chinese pressure.

But there are other more pressing matters. Parliament has not been able to sit and pass pending bills due to the UML not letting it function because of K P Oli's grudge against Speaker Agni Sapkota over his refusal to expel former party members including Madhav Kumar Nepal.

The five-year terms of Nepal's locally elected representatives, which began on 20 May 2017 are set to end on 19 May. Not holding these elections on time will undermine local governance because wards and municipalities will be left leaderless, delegitimising the country's still fragile federal system.

Some of the smaller parties are already campaigning against federalism, and a gridlock in local elections could bolster their argument that the system is too costly and not suitable for Nepal.

As the highly transmissible Omicron strain spreads across the country and overwhelms Nepal's limited healthcare infrastructure, villages and rural communities will need steady leadership more than ever.

The third wave has hit Nepal as the country enters the third year of the pandemic. During that time, power struggles at the top have largely paralysed the federal government's response to the crisis.

However, at the local level many elected representatives have been leading from

the frontlines to help constituents. This newspaper reported about mayors and ward chairs in Nawalpur and Khotang districts driving the sick to hospitals during the second wave. They set up local quarantine and isolation centres, and did not wait for Kathmandu to respond.

One of Nepal's development success stories in the past 40 years was that local elections have ensured accountability and service delivery. The 2017 local polls were the first in 20 years, and not having elected local leaders cost the country two decades in lost development.

National leaders treating local elections as if it is just another power play will be a misdeed against the Nepali people.

Shristi Karki



Playing politics with local elections will undermine Nepal's democracy and grassroots development

DIMAKAR CHETTRI

ONLINE PACKAGES



A backstreet in Kathmandu's tourist centre Thamel is becoming a new hub for Nepal's contemporary art scene with Kathmandu Art House, a four-storeyed block housing a dozen prominent Nepali artists like Erina Tamrakar, Sujana Dangol, SC Suman, Roshan Dangol, Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar who have set up shop here. Get up and close with the artists and their space in this video only at *Nepali Times* YouTube channel. Story: page 9.

EARTHQUAKE SAFETY

The greater risk from earthquake is because of a lack of legislation and implementation ('Lessons still not learned', Editorial, #1094). We should not count only on awareness. Government agencies should set an example by observing height limits. It is unfair to condemn small homeowners when the government allows massive towers and malls to be built over sacred ponds, and the surrounding hills to be bulldozed to the bone.

Kamal Ratna Tuladhar

• What are the city officials doing?

Bandana Shrestha

• Earthquakes do not kill people, poorly built structures do. Well said.

Anish Dahal

• No building codes, no inspection and we know that when they get toppled by an earthquake many people will be killed but those who have the money are above the law.

Stephen T Eckerd

• Many of the new high-rise hotels are not safe, and I wouldn't use them for clients, as there are no safe areas for people at the time of potential disaster, earthquake, or fire. And most roads are blocked from access by parked vehicles. Sad and dangerous.

Ian Wall

• Pure folly, reminds me of the Bhuj earthquake in Gujarat where entire multi-storey buildings keeled over following 'liquefaction' of the ground beneath.

Ranjit Devraj

• How tall are the ladders of the fire services? Globally, the greed of the real estate industry and people seem difficult to contain, so we have short-term private gain and long-term public liabilities. Also, when these edifices collapse, what will be the water situation? Says a lot about those who manage the city!

Samphe Lhalungpa

• The only solution to this problem is the implementation of federalism and development at the regional level.

Amar Tuladhar

NEPAL WAR CRIMES

Memories of this brutal insurgency will never be forgotten by peace-loving Nepalis, they still don't understand the point or outcome of this bloody revolution ('Nepal's unpunished war crimes', Sabita Adhikari, nepalitimes.com).

Anupama Mahat

• Who will punish the perpetrators when they are the ones in power? When we have the murderers ruling the country, what justice do you expect?

Lal Bahadur

URBAN FORESTATION

This is excellent ('Mini forests to make Kathmandu more liveable', Sonia Awale, #1094). We should start by implementing Miyawaki in all schools and college campuses, as well as residential buildings.

Ranjan Aatriya

• It will be a trend soon.

Rajan Sagar

• In the city where they cut beautiful trees for road expansion and everyone is eager to grab land, we need a strong movement for green Kathmandu.

Nisha Onta

KATHMANDU CIVILISATION

This is a fantastic piece of investigative journalism ('The historic Kathmandu beneath our feet', Sahina Shrestha, #1094).

Sunil Sakya

MILAN RAI

Inspiring and frustrating at the same time ('Nepali artist's butterfly effect', Kunda Dixit, nepalitimes.com).

Anita Anand

• His laudable effort is certainly conducive to creating a green oasis in the heart of the overly urbanised capital. I hope his persevering attempt will garner more support and insects and birds return where they used to inhabit.

N Himal

THIRD WAVE

There was every opportunity for people to vaccinate before but no, they rushed and crowded vaccination centres only when there was a new surge, further adding to the risk of infection. ('3rd wave in 2 years', Sonia Awale, #1094).

Sujan Subedi

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Creation to destruction, then revival

by Kunda Dixit
New book documents the preservation of Panauti's monuments and intangible heritage as it prepares for Makar Mela and six million pilgrims from Nepal and India in a month despite the third Covid wave due to Omicron. Full story with before-and-after photos at nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Nepali artist's butterfly effect

by Kunda Dixit
Nepali artist Milan Rai has come a long way since his project to stick white butterflies to trees. His art has now morphed into activism to save Kathmandu's open spaces. Visit the Nepali Times website to read the profile.

Most popular on Twitter

Lessons still not learnt

Editorial
Seven years after the earthquake, Kathmandu has become more dangerous with new multi-storey blocks in densely packed neighbourhoods. Awareness about earthquakes has not translated into safer construction. Join the discussion online.

Most commented



Mini forests to make Kathmandu more liveable

by Sonia Awale
A new reforestation method called Miyawaki allows densely packed carefully selected trees to grow in tiny plots of land in urban centres like Kathmandu, or even in household backyards. Learn more about how to develop 'urban jungles' in this report.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Mini Forests To Make #Kathmandu More Liveable Can a new #reforestation method, Miyawaki, turn an over-urbanised city into a clean and green haven? Possibly. @SoniaAwale reports:

Lexlimbu @lexlimbu
Nice read on the 'Miyawaki method' of reforestation as a way to turn tiny patches of land in cities into mini forests! #Green #Kathmandu @NepaliTimes

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Two siblings who survived a #Maoist attack in 2002 reflect on their struggles and look forward to a hopeful future. Read on:

Medlife_Crisis @asis_cfc
Give this a read!!!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
After painting on canvas, sticking butterflies on trees, wearing gas masks in traffic, and trying to rescue #openspaces, Milan Rai now realises these approaches are too piecemeal.

Rizolve #ClimateActionNow @rizolve_earth
Milan Rai, a true inspiration in Nepal today!

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
The @RubinMuseum in New York is returning the 14th century flying Apsara/Gandharva from Itum Bahal, and the upper section of the 17th century torana from Yampi Mahabihara/I-Bahi in Patan that were stolen in the 1980s.

Sandesh Tuladhar @sandesh
So happy to wake up to this. Thank you for doing the right thing @RubinMuseum

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Down, but not out



This week marks the 20th anniversary of the murder of schoolteacher Muktinath Adhikari by the Maoists in Lamjung district during the peak of the insurgency — for immediately not agreeing to donate 25% of his salary to their cause.

"But even after two decades, there has been no justice. The perpetrators were never caught. If this is the condition of such a high profile war crime, imagine what it is like for others who are not as well known," wrote Muktinath's daughter Sabita Adhikari this week in an opinion piece for nepalitimes.com

Excerpts from a report about the Maoist attack on Kapurkot in Salyan district from issue #77 18-24, January 2002 20 years ago this week:

As they usually do, the Maoists attacked in a human wave. Not all of them were armed, and while preparing for the attack they

chanted slogans, sang revolutionary songs and beat drums. They were hit by withering fire from army sentries on the hill. When a comrade was hit, an unarmed Maoist cadre would take up his weapon. In these remote mid-western hills, such tactics used to terrify locals, and the consequent fear was overwhelming. It is a measure of the Maoists' earlier confidence that they made no secret of an impending attack. Still, a demoralised police either abandoned their posts or cowered with their World War I vintage 303 rifles waiting for the devastating attacks.

The tables have now turned. Such psy-war tactics are not as effective with the Royal Nepal Army, and the Maoists have not been able to overrun a single army base after the surprise attack on the Ghorahi garrison on 23 November. As in Salleri on 26 November, the Maoists suffered heavy casualties in Kapurkot.

For ordinary people, life is hard as always but made harder by the fighting. Bhim Bahadur Magar walked nine hours from his home village to Libang to make his citizenship card. While waiting, he chatted with us in a tea shop. "There is no future here. I'm going to the Gulf to work. Earlier it was the police harassing us, these days it is Maoists," he said. "Now that the army is here, the situation has improved. But the army can't be everywhere at the same time."


From archives material of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com

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Editor Online: Sahina Shrestha Executive Editor: Sonia Awale Layout: Kiran Maharjan
Publisher: Kunda Dixit, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd | Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur | GPO Box 7251 Kathmandu
editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com | Tel: +977 1 5005601-08 Fax: +977 1 5005518



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3rd Covid wave infects Nepal's frontliners

The Delta wave resulted in a shortage of oxygen, Omicron so far is causing a shortage of health workers in Nepal's hospitals

● **Sonia Awale**

During the devastating second wave last year, hundreds of people were dying every day. Hospitals had run out of ICU beds and oxygen cylinders.

This time, hospitals are running out of medical staff.

As elsewhere, the third wave in Nepal is infecting healthcare workers, endangering not only patients with Covid pneumonia, but also those suffering from pre-existing conditions like kidney failure, diabetes, cancers or cardiovascular diseases.

This acute shortage in medical staff across Nepal due to the rapid spread of Omicron has prompted the Ministry of Health to consider shortening the isolation period for doctors, nurses and paramedics to five days. The US and India have already done so.

On Tuesday, there were 11,352 new cases out of 23,409 tested, bringing the positivity rate up to 48.5%. This is the highest ever daily new cases and positivity for Nepal.

Hundreds of health workers are testing positive daily in hospitals all over the country, turning health facilities themselves into a hotbed of the virus. "Omicron is spreading like wildfire through all hospitals, in ours alone we have 35 staff testing positive," says Sanduk Ruit of Tilganga Eye Hospital in Kathmandu.

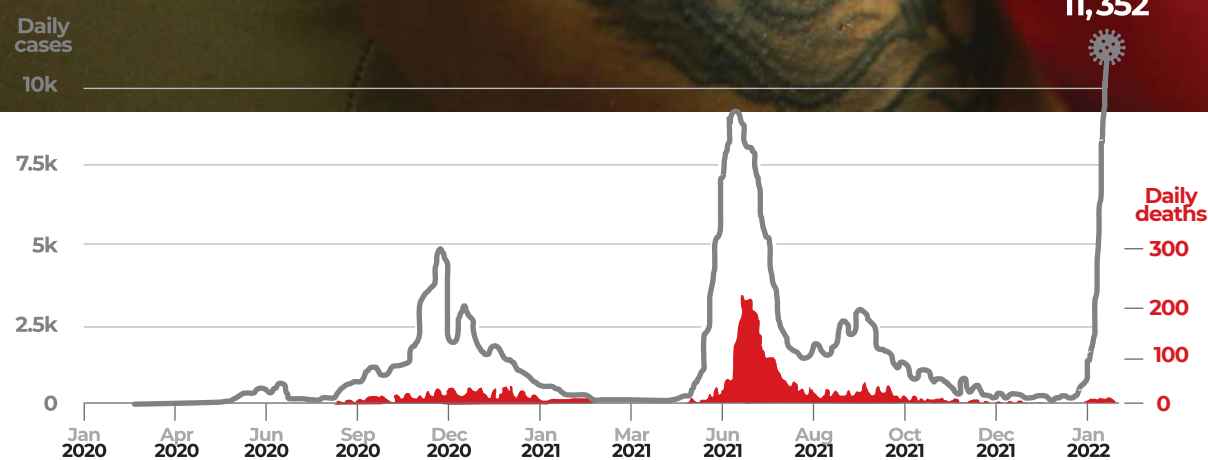
One of the bigger facilities in Kathmandu, HAMS Hospital, has 16 of its clinical staff in isolation after testing positive. On 17 January, 52 staff of the Trauma Centre Hospital tested positive in one day, affecting emergency care of accident victims.

"Health workers in every ward are infected, Covid has now spread from the emergency to the general ward, the blood bank, physiotherapy, ICU and even the administration," director of the Trauma Centre Pramod Joshi told *Nepali Times*.

The third wave has now even affected hospitals outside Kathmandu, which are struggling to



SHOT IN THE ARM: A hospital staff gets a booster shot in his tattooed arm on Wednesday as the government started providing third doses to frontliners.



AMITI MACHHAMISI

cope due to a shortage of staff.

Bayalpata Hospital in remote Achham district has curtailed some critical services like C-sections because of sick staff. Charikot hospital in Dolakha district is caring for an increasing number of coronavirus patients but with fewer staff.

"Some of us have mild but manageable symptoms but we are still working, we had a shortage of healthcare workers even before

this third wave," Binod Dangal of Charikot Hospital said. "In fact, we have fewer people than we had during the second wave, we have equipment but no trained staff. We are no better prepared than we were before."

The only respite during the third wave is that the new strain is much milder. Because Omicron's impact is largely confined to the upper respiratory tract, physicians say their patients do not need as much

oxygen or ventilator support as was the case with the Delta variant which primarily affected the lungs.

Most doctors in and outside Kathmandu say they expect infected staff to be back at work in a week after another test. Even so, given Nepal's largely unprepared and limited healthcare infrastructure which works on a shift basis, medical staff having to isolate just a few days can seriously disrupt medical care,

especially in rural areas where hospitals and doctors were always few and far between.

Indeed, this latest crisis reflects on a pre-existing chronic shortage of doctors, nurses and trained medical staff, says Bikash Gauchan of the Gandaki Province Infectious and Communicable Disease Hospital in Pokhara.

"What we are experiencing now is both an acute and chronic shortage of healthcare workers, and this carries a lesson for our government, to strengthen and prepare its medical resources for future pandemics," he adds.

Booster shots for frontliners including healthcare workers in Nepal started this week, and the additional dose will provide much needed protection to doctors and nurses who work in close contact with possibly infected patients.

But crowded vaccination centres themselves risk being breeding grounds for infection. This time the queues are not just of the unvaccinated getting their first jabs, but also those waiting for boosters. Even if vaccinated, doctors say masks and physical distancing are mandatory.

They warn the public not to be complacent because they are vaccinated and that Omicron is milder. Binod Dangal of Charikot Hospital says: "Most people are treating Omicron as a normal cold but it is very important we monitor the progress of the disease in the next few weeks, and prepare adequate critical care."

At Teku Hospital, virologist Sher Bahadur Pun says the shortage of healthcare workers will not persist, and the isolation period can be reduced. Nepal has likely passed the most infectious stage of Omicron spread and it is now time to keep a close watch on people who are isolating.

Pun adds: "We must also investigate which strain is causing Covid deaths in Nepal because if Omicron had indeed replaced Delta, our figures for mortality should not be as consistent as it was before the third wave." ■

prabhu BANK



India-Nepal power trade

Nepal and India have agreed to increase the capacity of the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur crossborder transmission line to allow import and export of up to 600MW of electricity. The 400kVA line is only able to handle 350MW at present. The agreement was reached at a virtual meeting between NEA's Sandip Deb and Rabintra Gupta of India's Central Electricity Authority on Tuesday. The 456MW Upper Tama Kosi plant is connected to this transmission line.

Anchal Kunwar at Daraz



Together with its rebranding, Daraz Nepal has appointed Anchal Kunwar as its new Managing Director. The Nepali was formerly a manager at Amazon and will replace Lino Ahlering. She has worked in various companies in the United States, including five years at Amazon.

Inflation on the rise

Nepal is experiencing its highest inflation in six years with the rate of consumer price steadily rising in recent months. The annual point-to-point consumer price inflation rose to 7.11% in November-December 2021. This year's monetary policy, released in July, had predicted that inflation would rise but had set a target of limiting it to 6.5%, the mark which Nepal has already passed.

Tourism down

The UNWTO has reported an increase of 4% in international tourists arrival in 2021 from 2020 but the numbers are still 72% below the pre-pandemic figures. It recommends lifting travel restrictions, easing travel protocols and widespread



vaccination programs for international tourism to grow by 30-78%. But given the Omicron surge, countries will likely fall back on travel restrictions with insufficient vaccine coverage.

Caregivers to Israel

The first batch of 99 Nepali caregivers left Kathmandu for Israel on 19 January to work in geriatric homes. More than 1,000 workers (70% of them females) will be leaving in the next month, after their departure was delayed due to the pandemic and other bureaucratic hassles in Nepal. This is a government-to-government (G2G) agreement between Nepal and Israel, and the workers will have the same laboursafeguards as Israeli workers. Israeli ambassador Hanan Goder was at the airport to see off the workers and said: "You will be a bridge between Nepali and Israeli families. This is a win-win cooperation between the countries and we are all proud to be a part of it."



Tigor EV in Nepal

Following the success of Tata's Tigor in Nepal, the company is launching its electric version in the country. Tigor EV was launched three months ago in India with an introductory price of INR1,199,000. With this, the Nepali market now has two EVs from Tata, Nexon and Tigor.

Himalayan to Kabul

Himalayan Airlines flew its first humanitarian flight this week to Kabul carrying 9.7 tons of relief materials including clothing, shoes, blankets and



medicine. The supply was handed over to officials of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. The flight was operated upon request of Nepal's Foreign Ministry and the cost of Rs12.5 million was borne by Himalayan Airlines.

Top Nepali ACCA

Nepali student Riya Manandhar of the British Professional College has been ranked first in the world in the Taxation paper in the December 2021 exam session of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA). Of the 13,000 students, only 6,400 appeared in the exam successfully.

FonePay record

FonePay payment services set a new record with a total transaction of almost Rs51 billion using QR, inter-bank and business payments. With a Rs10 charge, users can send a transaction of any amount by directly clicking on the online transaction option of any bank or mobile app.



Khukri Spiced Rum

Following its successes in Korea and Japan, Khukri is introducing its Spiced Rum in Nepal as well. The rum had its trial in Butwal and Bhairawa where consumers preferred to mix it with cola or have it neat. The company is making a limited release of the rum this year. "This is a premium product, its taste and quality is of the highest standard," says Subash Lamichane of The Nepal Distilleries.



DishHome Shorts

DTH/Internet service provider DishHome has partnered with ShortsTV making Nepal the second South Asian country to introduce short movies-based TV channel, after India. The short movies will also include Nepali films and will be shown on channel 928 available through the DishHome Go app.

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Two siblings who survived a Maoist attack in 2002 speak of their long struggle and hopes for the future

● Sahina Shrestha

It was exactly 20 years ago that Rabina Regmi and her brother Rabin were travelling with their parents when their bus was attacked with petrol bombs by Maoists along the East-West Highway in Sarlahi.

As the fire spread, the driver lost control and the bus toppled over into a ditch. Rabina, aged 5 and Rabin, 3, and their mother, Anju, were the last to be rescued.

All three suffered severe burns, and a video taken at the time shows the two children huddled around their mother, crying and in shock.

Anju died after two weeks of pain and agony in a hospital in



Raxaul. Rabina had burns all over her face, her hands and stomach. Rabin had burns on his face, a gash on his head, deep cut on his leg and his left hand was broken. Two other passengers also lost their lives in the attack.

After *Nepali Times* reporter Naresh Newar's story appeared in this newspaper in 2002, the tragedy came to represent the face of a meaningless war, and there was an outpouring of support from readers. Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital offered reconstructive surgery to the children, and Bright Horizon Children's Home and School took responsibility for their education till college.

"Telling their story was important because there wasn't enough coverage on how the war was affecting children," says Naresh Newar. "The Maoist were attacking public spaces without regards to who may be affected from their actions, this story showed the victim's side of story."

Newar followed up with the family numerous times and is grateful for the positive impact it had for the family. The last time he met them, the siblings were happily settled in at the school.

The Regmi family's tragedy and ordeal was depicted in *A People War*, a photo book trilogy curated by Kunda Dixit and featured in Kesang Tseten and Prem BK's documentary *Frames of War*.

Now aged 25 and 23, Rabina and Rabin still bear scars from the tragedy, but are determined to not let their past hold them back. Rabina is a final year BBA student at Global College of Management and wants to get into banking. Rabin is doing his BSc in Agriculture from Chandigarh University. After the campus closed last year due to the pandemic, he in Kathmandu attending online classes.

Their father Bhakta Bahadur Regmi is a forest ranger stationed in Hetauda, the same job he had 20 years ago. He is grateful for all the help his children have got over the years from the school, hospital, and others, but says it has been two decades of struggle without their mother.

There has been no help from



the state. "Everywhere we go, they ask for identification cards proving that we are conflict victims. But we don't have any papers to prove that," he says. Even today, he carries a folder of newspaper cuttings and old medical records of his children.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mandated to provide identification cards to conflict survivors, and inform

them about investigations into war crimes. But without political connections, and no time to scour many government offices, Bhakta Bahadur and his family have been left to fend for themselves. The attackers were never identified and did not have to answer for their crime.

For the past 20 years, Rabina and Rabin have needed numerous operations to heal their wounds,

including reconstructive and orthopaedic surgery, laser treatment, even hair transplant. The fees for surgeries are waived or subsidised, but the cost of travel, medicines and hospital stay add up.

In 2015, when Rabina was getting another of her laser treatments for burn scars, the Indian blockade led to a shortage of medicines. "The doctors had to perform the procedure without

Tsering Sumjok shines bright

Badly injured as a baby, Dolpo native never gave up and is now helping her home community

Last November, in the waiting room of a hospital in Bad Kreuznach in Germany, Tsering Sumjok Gurung caught a glimpse of a familiar face.

The tall man with greying hair and moustache was wearing a white coat over a yellow jumper. He was none other than plastic surgeon André Borsche who had treated her horrific childhood burn injury at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital in Kathmandu ten years previously.

"It was an emotional reunion for both of us," Tsering, now 23, remembers. "He was very friendly and wanted to see how my injuries had healed."

Tsering was 18 months old that summer when her family made the annual migration up to high pasture to graze their yaks. One day, while her mother was tending the livestock, Tsering fell off her crib right into the fireplace. She was badly burnt on her back, and right arm.

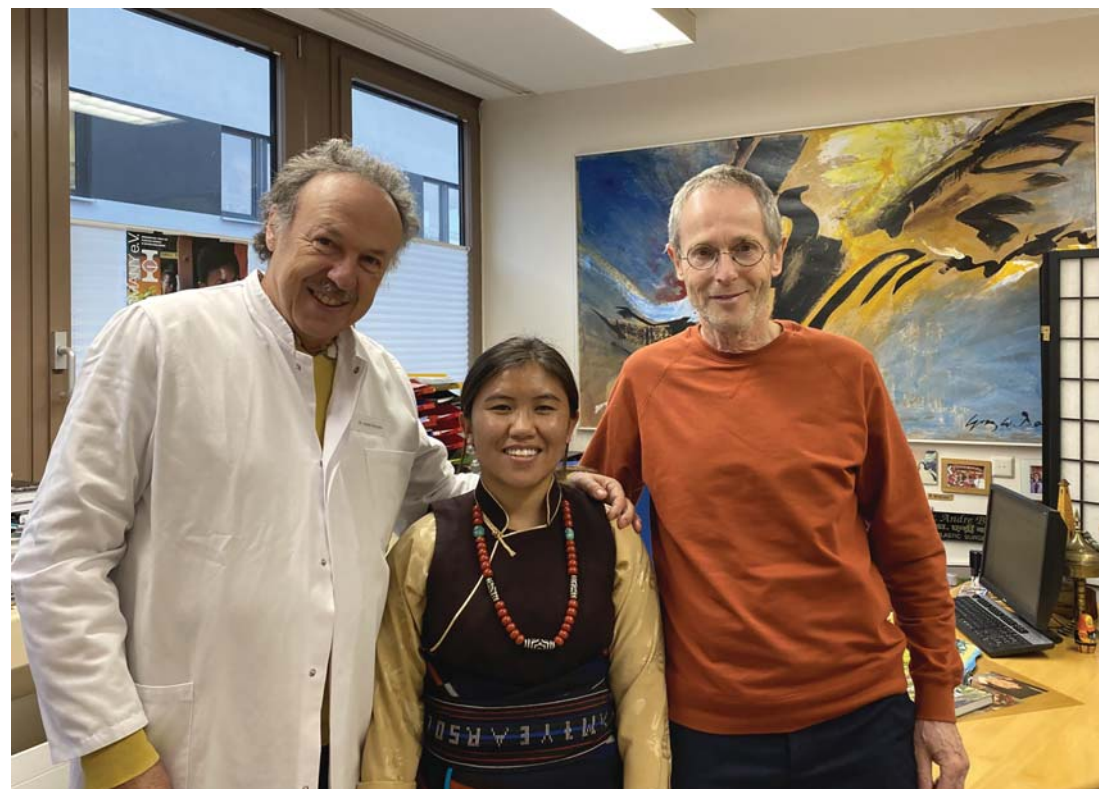
There were no doctors in her village of Bhijer, so she was treated for the next four years by the local *amchi* healer. This kept her alive, but the skin on her right arm was fused with the torso. All her childhood, Tsering was carried around in a *doko* bamboo basket.

"Burns are common in Dolpo because home life revolves around the kitchen fire," says Tsering. "I was lucky."

Despite being painful to move around, Tsering started going to school in Bhijer and excelled in studies. In Grade 2, a group of wealthy American and Swiss trekkers visited the school that they had supported. They noticed Tsering, examined her injuries, and helped bring her to Kathmandu for school and treatment. Over the years, the two families have also funded a hospital and a cheese factory in the village.

Tsering used to watch her classmates in Kathmandu run and play, or dance in school programs, but could not participate because of her injury. She was eventually admitted to the Sushma Koirala Hospital, which is supported by INTERPLAST-Germany, where André Borsche and his team performed five major operations with reconstructive surgery. Every week, she had to make a painful bus ride from her dorm in Boudha to the hospital in Sankhu for physiotherapy and follow-ups.

She missed many classes, but she made up for it by reading books which inspired her to become a doctor, so she could serve her community in Dolpo. Not able to afford



REUNION ACROSS TIME AND SPACE: Tsering Sumjok Gurung with German plastic surgeon André Borsche (left) and journalist Peter Hinze (right). Borsche had treated her childhood injury at the Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital in Kathmandu.

higher education, in 2017 she started working as a hostel warden at a school in Chobar.

That is when she met German journalist Peter Hinze who was researching his first book on The Great Himalayan Trail, and Tsering later travelled with him to Upper Dolpo to make a film with herself as the lead character.

Tsering was back in Bhijer for the first time in ten years, and her family and neighbours were surprised how much she had grown and changed. Her injuries were not visible anymore, and no one could believe

that a little girl who had such terrible injuries would be so transformed.

"I met the right people who helped me get treatment, otherwise my life would have been different," Tsering says. "Even now, there are many children in my neighbouring villages who are not as fortunate."

The film project was cancelled because of the pandemic, but Hinze converted the research into the book *100000 Schritte zum Glück* about Dolpo, and invited Tsering to Germany for the unveiling in November. The book made it to number 4 on Amazon's



PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

HELP TO HEAL: Bhakta Prasad Regmi with Rabin and Rabina (above) in Kathmandu last week to recall the family's traumatic war experience from 20 years ago.

Rabin, now 23, still needs surgery and hair transplants. He is studying to be an agriculture engineer. Rabina wants to do an MBA.

Anju Regmi with Rabina before the petrol bomb attack on a bus killed her (far, left).

Another photograph from the family album of Rabin and Rabina while receiving burns treatment in 2003 (below).

Report by Naresh Newar in *Nepali Times* about the bus attack from 29 November-5 December 2002 issue #121 (right).



Why the children?

The scars on Rabina and Rabin (above) represent the face of our wounded nation

REPORT BY NARESH NEWAR

Bhakta Bahadur Regmi can't bear to look at the scars on his children. He was a soldier in the Maoist army during a violent attack on his home in Kathmandu in 2002. The children were injured when he was taking them to their home.

"I can't bear to look at them," he says. "I want to see them safe and healthy. I want to see them study and work and live like normal people. I want to see them grow up and be successful. I want to see them live like normal people."

He says the children are the face of our wounded nation. Even though he is a soldier, he has a heart for his children. He wants to see them safe and healthy. He wants to see them study and work and live like normal people. He wants to see them grow up and be successful. He wants to see them live like normal people.

The children were injured when he was taking them to their home. The scars on the children are a reminder of the violence they have experienced. He wants to see them safe and healthy. He wants to see them study and work and live like normal people. He wants to see them grow up and be successful. He wants to see them live like normal people.

Naresh Newar is a reporter for the *Nepali Times*. He has written about the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and the impact it has had on the country's people.

anaesthesia and it was very painful," recalls Bhakta Bahadur. Later, her wounds got infected and she had to get it treated again. Rabin has not had laser surgery due to financial constraints.

At Bright Horizon, the siblings aced their studies. Rabin passed his SEE with a GPA of 3.85, the highest from his batch. Rabina was also a good student, and the school is still helping them with college fees,

while their father struggles to cover other costs.

The first year Rabina was at the boarding school, she ran away. "I did not know anyone there and I missed home," she says. "But later, it became our home. Both of us made life-long friends there."

Bhakta Bahadur describes Rabina as the calm one. Rabin on the other hand was a mischievous little boy. He says, "Both of them

felt at home at Bright Horizon, when I went to pick them up during holidays, they'd refuse to come home saying their mother wasn't there."

At school, Rabina made it a point to look out for her brother. Every time Rabin got into fights with his friends, his elder sister would come to his rescue. Today, the two share their hopes and dreams, supporting each other and

hope to take care of their father who has sacrificed all to raise them.

Wary of the country's situation, Rabina now wants to go abroad for her MBA. Rabin wants to complete his MSc and then try for the civil exams. "The two of us came to the conclusion that one of us should go abroad and the other should stay back," says Rabin. "We have seen how much difference having a family member abroad

makes for the economic wellbeing of families."

Having brought up the children on his own, Bhakta Bahadur still worries about their future. But he is happy the two have become responsible young adults ready to take charge of their own lives.

Rabina says with determination, "We have had to depend on our father for so long. Now, we want to look after him, and our family."



Tsering Sumjok Gurung and Peter Hinze with Tsering's family in Dolpo.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY: PETER HINZE

10000 Schritte zum Glück by Peter Hinze.

bestseller list in Germany.

And he had a surprise in store – a meeting with the surgeon who had treated her in Kathmandu all those years ago. It was an emotional and joyful reunion.

"This was one of the best days in my 26-year career, when I could see the wonderful result of our charity work," said André Borsche.

Tsering was equally happy: "I made it from my family stone hut in Bhijer to the hospital in Germany to meet the surgeon who changed my life."

In the hospital, Borsche examined her

burn scars and was satisfied with how well her back had healed. He suggested one more operation, but Tsering refused any more treatment.

"I am over medical procedures for now," Tsering told *Nepali Times* on her return from Germany. "After all those surgeries, I am put off by the sight of blood. I don't want to think about the pain afterwards. For now I think I am ok."

These days, when Tsering is not busy with her full-time work at the Chobar school, she helps Hinze with Project Dolpo, a private initiative to support those who need

assistance in her home district. She gets frequent calls from families in Dolpo who are in distress.

Says Hinze: "I think this is a motivating story about a girl who never gave up, and who trusted herself. It shows how when help gets to the right people, the underprivileged and the almost forgotten, it can make a big difference to their lives."

This past week in Kathmandu, Tsering has been busy taking a seven-year-old boy from Dolpo who was also badly burnt with boiling water, and was brought to Kathmandu for treatment. Tsering has been taking the patient

to the burns hospital in Kirtipur for medical attention.

"It happened to me, and now to this boy. These accidents occur so frequently and Upper Dolpo just does not have the facilities to treat burn injuries," says Tsering.

For now, she wants to complete her education and ultimately return to Dolpo: "I feel it is my responsibility to give back to my community. The only way my village is going to develop is when young people like me get educated, and head back to help others like us. There is so much to do."

Sahina Shrestha

EVENTS

**Dance classes**

Sign up to take bharatnatyam, ballet, hip-hop, freestyle, and contemporary dance lessons from Sushila Arts Academy. Call the academy for details. 9860588626

Bhimdhunga Day Hike

Participate in the seven-hour hike organised by Hike For Nepal from Bhimdhunga to Indradaha this week. 22 January, Rs600, 9808771952

Health Camp

Get full body check-ups and learn more about healthy living in tis health camp organised by Medicare Pharma. Call for more details. 22 January, 10am onwards, 9843242865

**Yoga training**

Register to learn yoga from an academically certified instructor at Sambodhi Yoga. 26 January, 7am onwards, 9851162688

Le Sherpa market

Support local businesses. Shop for fresh fruit and vegetables, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Physical distancing measures apply. Saturdays, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa, Maharajgunj

DINING

**Chez Caroline**

Tucked away from the main street, this quiet corner is a must for authentic French and continental cuisine. Try the Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce. Baber Mahal Revisited (01) 4263070

ONLINE ARCHIVES

Virtual street art

Google Arts Project: Street Art showcases the world's greatest graffiti works and tells the stories behind them, including those of Nepal. Viewers can take virtual walking tours, view online exhibitions and learn about the artists themselves.

The world at home

Travel may be limited these days, but discovering incredible experiences from across the globe doesn't have to be. GetYourGuide's The World at Home initiative brings some of their top tours, activities, and attractions to you online. Find everything on their YouTube channel.

**Herne Katha**

The web series depicts untold stories of ordinary people from across the country. Head to their YouTube channel to take a tour of Nepal through the documentaries.

Europeana

Discover cultural heritage from 3,000 museums, galleries, libraries and archives across Europe. Go online to read about historical places, watch exhibitions, photographs, ancient manuscripts and more.

**Underwater tour**

Take Google's Life in the Ocean Deep underwater tour and discover the mysteries of the sea with Sir David Attenborough. Watch videos and underwater maps, and learn about the unique creatures that inhabit the world's oceans.

**Le Mirch**

Enjoy the bold and savory Indian cuisine subtly influenced by French fine dining at Le Mirch. The restaurant also offers gluten free options. Labim Mall (01) 5527437

Kunga

Head to Kunga Hotel for some of the best Chinese cuisine. Don't miss out on the hotpot, peanut chicken and shredded potatoes. Boudha (01) 4915117

About Town

GETAWAY

**Dwarika Resort**

Dwarika Resort is the perfect getaway, from the appetizing multi-cuisine food to the re-energising spa experience. Try crystal salt therapy during the visit. Dhulikhel (11) 490612

Bandipur Safari Lodge

Explore the rich cultural heritage and wildlife Bandipur has with the Bandipur Safari Lodge. Bandipur, 9449597880

Hotel Baha

Spend a few days at this traditionally built hotel at the heart of Bhaktapur. The hotel offers a peaceful ambience, delicious food, and the historic heritage of the old town. Bhaktapur (01) 6616810

**Lake View Resort**

Lake View, with its cosy huts featuring hand crafted wooden furniture, local stone exteriors, and spectacular view promises a perfect weekend getaway. Lake Side (061) 461477

Tiger Tops Tharu Lodge

Get up and close with the local Tharu culture at the Tiger Tops, located four kilometers away from Chitwan National Park. Kawasoti, Nawalparasi (07)8690721

Kyubi's Kitchen

Kyubi's offers not only a space for anime lovers, but noodles, dumplings and meals as scrumptious as seen in any Japanese cartoon. Jhamsikhel, 9810298050

**Buingal**

With a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Buingal has something for everyone. Give the vegetarian sekuwa a try. Maitidevi (01) 4421393

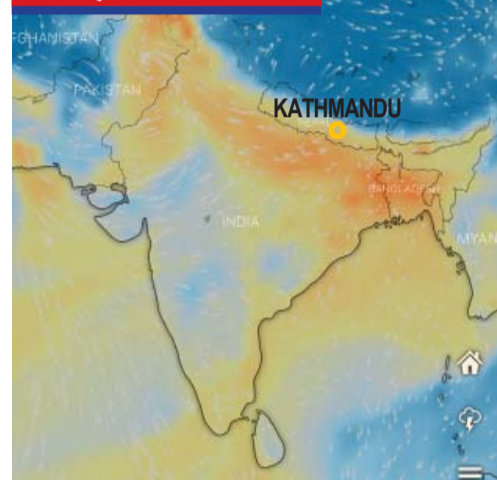
WEEKEND WEATHER



A broad westerly front is approaching Nepal and will start dumping more snow on Nepal's western mountains by Friday morning. This low pressure wave will weaken as it moves across Nepal, but is likely to bring blizzard conditions in the high mountains and passing showers in the high valleys and plains. The Dept of Meteorology and Hydrology forecasts a slight letup on Saturday with more clouds, rain and snow arriving on Sunday and persisting into early next week.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
13° 4°	14° 5°	13° 5°

AIR QUALITY INDEX



The westerly system that will dominate central Nepal over the weekend will depress daytime temperature, increasing the pollution load at ground level in the Valley. Although the rain will wash down some of the suspended particulates, it tends to build up, especially in the morning and towards evening. The only bright side, as it were, is that fewer vehicles on the roads due to the Omicron surge in the Valley will mean less exhaust. But this will be more than compensated by prevailing winds blowing in crossborder pollution.

Forecast for PM2.5 concentration over South Asia on Saturday morning. Yellow and red, bad, blue good.



OUR PICK

An ex-British soldier and a night manager of a luxury hotel in Cairo is recruited by an intelligence officer as a covert operative to infiltrate the inner circle of a secret arms dealer in this 2016 miniseries based on a novel of the same name. The highly acclaimed British show *The Night Manager* has six episodes and stars Tom Hiddleston, Hugh Laurie, Olivia Colman, Tom Hollander, David Harewood and Elizabeth Debicki.

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न धुँदा जाने, न रुँदा जाने
त्यसैले कोरोना लाग्नै नदिन
भीडभाडमा नजाने

महिला स्वास्थ्यकर्मीहरूले सुरक्षा सल्लाहहरूको साथ महामारीको रोकथाम र नियन्त्रण गरेका छन्।

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Thamel's new Art Street

A backstreet in Kathmandu's tourist centre becomes a new hub for Nepal's contemporary art scene

● Ashish Dhakal

Under a canopy of prayer flags and electrical wires, a quiet backstreet of Thamel is reinventing itself to be the new epicentre for Nepali art.

Away from the bustling main roads of this tourist quarter of Kathmandu, along a narrow winding alley is Kathmandu Art House, a four-storeyed block with large lower-case letters on the facade: 'art st'.

Art Street is not an immediately obvious facelift, the building has been around for years. Nevertheless, it aims to provide Nepali artists with a platform to work and showcase their creativity in a one-stop shop.

It is perhaps fitting that Art Street is adjacent to Kathmandu Guest House which became a catalyst in the 1970s for the evolution of Thamel as a backpacker destination, replacing Jhonchhe which was known in the Hippie era as 'Freak Street'.

Thamel got branded as a place for budget travellers, and with the renovated Kathmandu Guest House and Art St is reinventing itself to be more upmarket.

"This side of Thamel lacked identity, which is why I came up with this idea," explains Rajan Sakya of Kathmandu Guest House who also established the nearby Museum of Nepali Art (MoNA) and turned the courtyard of Kathmandu Guest House into a permanent exhibition space for sculptures.

Showing a visitor around, Sakya says, "We have plenty of malls in Kathmandu but we lack an avenue for intellectual entertainment. Art is as much a part of our identity as mountaineering and trekking, which is why I wanted to create an environment rich with artistic expression."

Each room at the Kathmandu Art House



MONIKA DEUPALA



KUNDA DIXIT

is rented out at up to Rs25,000, a dozen prominent Nepali artists like Erina Tamrakar, Sujan Dangol, SC Suman, Roshan Dangol, Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar have set up shop here. The names of the artists are emblazoned on the street-side facade next to the 'art st' sign.

The artists all have their very own private atelier where visitors can browse through their works, talk to them about their craft, and even purchase their favourite pieces.

Artists in Nepal often complain that not many people buy Nepali art, let alone go to exhibitions and view paintings on show. "This is not indicative of a low volume of output, as it is of a smaller market," says Sakya. "To say Nepali art is not appreciated enough is directly related to how few galleries and platforms there are in Nepal at present."

Raj Prakash Man Tuladhar, a traditionally trained painter of *paubha*, completes only 2-3 paintings each year, given the meticulous detail that goes into creating them, and yet he does not have space at home to display them.

"Thanks to the art house, I have a studio that is also my exhibition space," Tuladhar says, gesturing to walls lined with vibrant *paubha* depicting fierce and benevolent deities. "Earlier, I could only tell people about progress in paintings, now they get to see me at work, and my entire collection in one place. This allows me to develop a closer connection with art lovers."

This is a feeling shared by Roshan Dangol, another artist-in-residence at Kathmandu Art House. "I was first introduced to this place by fellow artist Samundra Man Singh Shrestha, and it was a good move," he says.

Two windows in his studio frame trees and buildings outside in a canvas of their own, letting in ample sunlight and birdsong. An easel stands in the middle of the room with a work-in-progress spread.

"There is a creative environment here," Dangol says, "I find the greenery outside and engagement with other artists encouraging and inspiring." Dangol, 30, was recently commissioned by mountaineer Reinhold Messner during his recent visit to create two artworks for the Messner Mountain Museum in Italy. Dangol credits the exposure to Kathmandu Art House: "I probably would not have found the same level of national and international recognition otherwise."

Earlier, Dangol's charcoal drawings would often lie rolled-up or stacked in his home studio, gathering dust. Here, many have found room on the walls, all framed as in an exhibition.

"When people come to look at my art," he adds, "I no longer have to try and explain them with words. Here, I can show my different styles and experiments, and my paintings are right in front of them to view in one space." Thamel was chosen for this new initiative primarily because of the large footfall of tourists, both domestic and international, that it receives annually, making it a prime location for people to be acquainted with the artists and their works.

"We cannot wait for the government to come along and declare this spot as an art zone," says Rajan Shakya. "We have to take the initiative ourselves and help reach Nepali art new heights and gain widespread recognition." 🇳🇵

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Rohit, Amit and Dhana

Three migrant workers highlight the unique aspects of India-Nepal labour corridor

● Priti Thapa

Rohit

Rohit is from Bihar and drives an auto rickshaw in Mumbai. Life has been a struggle ever since he lost his parents in a car crash. Like many young men from Bihar in this big city, he migrated here to make a living.

Then came the pandemic in 2020, and the lockdown meant that Rohit had no income at all. He and his family had to rely on the municipality's two free meals a day.

"Mumbai belongs to the rich, except during elections," says the 23-year-old as he negotiates the city's dreary traffic, recalling how his wife and young son were evicted from their room for unpaid rent.

But one day a miracle happened. A Nepali caregiver named Manjeela, whom Rohit knew, came to the rescue and along with her two daughters offering his family shelter and food for a few weeks.

Rohit says he and his wife struggled to comprehend Manjeela's generosity. Why was she going out of her way to help a poor family when their own family in Bihar had refused to help them?



"I am so used to people turning their back on me that I just did not understand Manjeela's kindness. It felt uncomfortable to accept such a genuine gesture," he adds.

Manjeela then found out from the media that the popular Bollywood actor Sonu Sood was helping migrant workers like Rohit with transportation to their homes. She coordinated with Sood's team and registered Rohit and his family so they could travel back to Bihar.

"Sonu Sir came to see us off and I even got to shake his hands," smiles Rohit.

Had it not been for Manjeela and Sonu Sood, Rohit knows he would have been one of the hundreds of thousands walking home to their villages along train tracks, evicted and penniless — an iconic image during India's first lockdown in early 2020. "What other option did we have? Even thinking about the possibility of walking back brings tears to my eyes," he says.

Adds Rohit: "For tens of thousands like me, Sonu was a real-life hero. But for my family specifically, Manjeela was an angel. I will never be able to forget what they did for me and my family."

Amit

A quiet man with a wide smile, 45-year-old Amit spent a decade in Saudi Arabia taking care of a family of seven, alongside three other South Asian migrants including a Nepali housemaid.

He had come home to India for his nephew's wedding when Covid-19 hit, and he was stuck because of a Saudi ban on flights because of the Delta outbreak. Two years later, it finally looks like he can rejoin his employment, but only by making a convoluted journey through Kathmandu for a flight to Riyadh.

India has finally been lifted off the Saudi red list, but direct flights from Mumbai are unaffordable for Amit. That is why he is flying from Delhi to Kathmandu along with three other stranded Indian migrant workers. This is a less expensive option — at least that is what his agent told him.

Agents are skillful at finding loopholes around flight bans and restrictions, and provide options for desperate workers like Amit. But the Kathmandu option is also expensive for him: he had to pay the agent ₹85,000, including costs for a two-week quarantine in Nepal.

It was not an ideal arrangement, given pre-Covid flights were a fraction of what he is paying now, but Amit says at least he will start earning again soon. The uncertainties brought by Omicron might trap him for extended periods once again, but he cannot afford to take any more chances.



"For now, the priority is my daughter's wedding," says Amit who will have to pay the groom up to ₹400,000 (Rs640,000) in dowry. This is over 15 months of his wages, even if he were to save every paise. There are other regular costs to take care of back home — for food, medicine, loans for the ticket and his children's education, making it difficult to save even a small portion of his earnings.

Amit looks out of the plane's window at Himalayan peaks as the plane begins its descent into Kathmandu. He says: "The work in Saudi is not easy. What work is easy? But it pays, and that's what matters. I can save ₹25,000 a month, and that's more than double of what I can earn in India."

Some names have been changed.



pay recruiters for the overseas jobs.

But Dhana's work history is unique. He has been to India before, then to Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, UAE and he has come right back to India after his boss in the UAE transferred him to look after his home in India.

Older Nepali migrant workers find the culture and familiarity of India more appealing, even though the earnings may not be as much as elsewhere. Many others are here for seasonal work as drivers or security guards because they cannot afford to pay recruiters for jobs in the Gulf. Younger Nepalis, however, do not find India as appealing.

Despite being one of the largest destination countries for Nepali workers, India seldom gets the attention it deserves and is treated akin to internal migration. There is no precise count of Nepali workers in India because of the open border and no requirement for permits. But this migrant workforce suddenly became visible during India's Covid lockdowns as Nepalis streamed back in the hundreds of thousands.

Dhana himself works at an Indian household, so was spared during Covid-19. But he knows of many Nepalis who suffered. Four of his acquaintances who lived close by lost their lives during the 2021 Delta peak.

Deaths of Nepali workers in India also go largely unnoticed — with or

without Covid-19. There is no count, no compensation to families of the deceased, and no government help with repatriation as happened from the Gulf or Malaysia.

"The only consolation is that here you can expect that full procedures will be followed during funerals according to Hindu rituals which you probably cannot expect elsewhere," says Dhana. "The Nepal government should compensate families of the deceased as they are from the poorest families."

But he is quick to note the privileges of being a migrant in India versus other countries where he has lived and worked. "You don't become undocumented in India. You are not obliged to stay with the same employer," he says.

Dhana should know: he had spent months hiding in the jungles of Johor Baru in Malaysia with 19 other Nepalis to avoid raids when he became undocumented because his employer went bankrupt.

He quit his job in Saudi Arabia after three months despite having paid Rs100,000 to a recruiter. In both cases, he felt trapped as he wasn't able to exit the countries without incurring fees, and was mentally stressed.

After making a full circle back to India where he had spent over a decade in his early twenties before venturing to Malaysia and the Gulf, he values the freedom for Nepali workers like him there.

Dhana

Dhana is from Gulmi district in Nepal, and is finally flying home from Delhi after the pandemic hit two years ago.

"Nepal is so close, yet I have not seen my family for two-and-half years," he says.

For many Nepalis, a work stint in India is a stepping stone to go to Malaysia or the Gulf. They can save enough in India to afford to

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New election symbols

Besides defending its title as the most corrupted country in South Asia, Nepal has belatedly also been recognised in the Guinness Book as having the highest per capita number of Communist parties this side of the Sewage Canal.

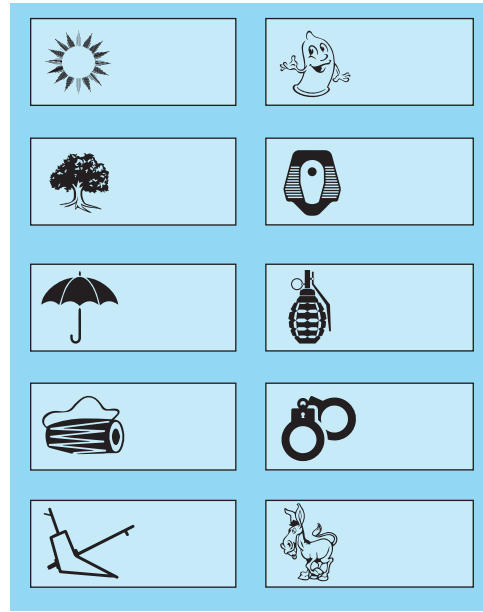
However, the 50 shades of red parties has the unintended side-effect that there isn't an electronic voter machine that has been invented yet that has enough buttons to be of any use here in local, provincial and federal elections this year. Additionally, since every party worth its salt needs a symbol, the Election Commission has run out of them.

Popular symbols like sun, moon, tree, hammers and sickles have all been taken on

a first-come-first-served basis. Which means we will have to fall back on the diversity of Nepal's flora and fauna. The cow and goat are already reserved, so we can offer scorpion, vulture, porcupine, and (the Donkey is pleased to announce) a jack ass to parties that do not yet have symbols.

At the rate parties are splitting, even this will not suffice. We need symbols that more accurately reflect the ethos of the parties in question. For instance, a hand grenade is an apt symbol for ex-guerrillas who want voters to remember the terror. Voters would also make an immediate connection between certain parties and the handcuff symbol.

Some of these symbols will be so coveted that the Election Commission may



have to auction them off, have a lottery, or simply do an underhand deal. The Family Party could be given the condom as an election symbol to set it apart from others, and also simultaneously spread awareness among the electorate about contraception.

Now that Nepal has declared itself open-defecation free, the forthcoming election could be the perfect opportunity to de-stigmatise the squat latrine and assist in the government's campaign of Flush Toilets for All by 2025.

The real problem about elections is that no one gives a Rat's Ass (in a manner of speaking) about them. The question on everyone's mind is what happens if local elections can't be held in April? Luckily, the High and Mighty Political Mechanism already has a cunning plan. But it's top secret.



The Ass

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